



WASHINGTON COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT
GOVERNMENT CENTER

14949 62nd Street North, PO Box 6 * Stillwater, MN 55082-0006
Office 651/430-6655 * TDD 651/439-3220 * Facsimile Machine 651/430-6730

**Protocol for Investigation Of Public Health
Nuisance Complaints**

August 2003

1. Environmental Specialists and Senior Environmental Specialists, regardless of primary program assignment, will be the normal first responders to public health nuisance complaints.
2. Decision on assignment for response will be made between the Solid/Hazardous Waste Program Manager and the Environmental Health Program Manager based on the nature of the complaint, the availability of staff and the priority timeframe for response.
3. Based on information gathered at the time of the complaint, a Public Health Nurse may also be assigned to be a part of the investigation response team.
4. Consistent with Department Safety Policy #203, Employees may remove themselves from a situation in which the employee considers him/herself to be "at risk" without fear of reprisal or negative performance implications. When the employee removes themselves from such a situation, the incident must be reported to the Program Manager.

Prior to Making Site Visit

Complaint is received

Complaint is entered into complaint database. Based on the origination of the complaint, the person receiving the complaint should collect additional information to help assess the situation. Possible questions include:

1. Ask complainant if there are conditions that staff need to be aware of such as any unusual activity, animals, children or mental health issues.
2. Check with public health nurses or social workers.
3. Call local law enforcement to determine past responses or known difficulties.
4. Call and advise the party of our expected visit. Assess the conversation and make modifications to plan as necessary.
5. Notify Manager of visit.

Ask for assistance if necessary or unsure of the situation

1. Always discuss your site visit plans with your Manager.
2. Ask another Environmental Specialist to accompany you. If you might encounter issues with which you might not be familiar, ask a staff with that expertise to accompany you.
3. Ask for Law Enforcement assistance.
4. Ask another professional such as a public health nurse or social worker to accompany you.
5. Brief other environmental specialists on situation.

Chart your location/plan for back-ups

1. Tell the front desk receptionist that you are leaving. Make sure that you tell her where you are going, what time you should be back and who she should notify if you do not arrive back to the office within one half hour of designated time. Specifically tell her that there may be some danger involved.
2. Make sure that all of your communication devices are operational. This would include your pager, cell phone, walkie talkies, alarms, etc..
3. Take necessary PPE based on the hazards expected. At a minimum, this should include safety glasses, gloves and sturdy walking shoes. A Public Health Nuisance PPE Kit is available for checkout. Wear shoes and clothing that allow you to move easily. Immediately leave the area and call 911 if a respiratory hazard exists.
4. Notify other county staff (ie. social worker, public health nurse, law enforcement) as necessary, and make arrangements for them to meet you at the site.
5. Establish a communication plan that includes the telephone number at the inspection site (if available), the pager and cell phone numbers of the staff responding, estimated time of inspection start/finish and return to work, and emergency phone numbers (911, Manager phone number/pager/cell phone, State Duty Officer).
6. Discuss your site visit plans with your Manager. If your Manager is not available, notify Manager of the Day of your plans and any anticipated difficulties. Do not conduct a site visit without prior Manager consultation.

Site Visit

Assess the area before entering

1. Of primary importance is your own personal safety. Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in any given situation, leave and call for assistance.
2. Drive around the area and look for unsafe conditions like poor lighting, limited visibility (fences, bushes), unsecured animals, people yelling, drinking, fighting, or loitering. Look for other sources of help like neighbors at home, open businesses, other community workers or utility trucks.
3. Park your car to provide an easy escape route; this would include parking in the street or backing into a parking space to allow for forward egress out of a location. Make sure your car is in good repair and has enough gas. If possible try to park where you can see your car from the house. Choose a spot that provides the safest walking route to the house.

4. Lock your car. Keep valuables out of sight. Do not carry a purse.
5. As you leave the car, be confident and walk purposefully toward your destination.
6. If two staff are available, one should remain outside until it is determined that it is safe to enter.

Entrance

Any incident or circumstance that makes staff uncomfortable should be reported to a manager immediately. Examples of such situations are: unsecured weapons, unsecured pets, threatening clients or family members, or residences where illegal activity appears to be taking place. Make an excuse that you forgot something in your car and immediately leave the area and call 911.

1. If a law enforcement officer is present, they should gain access for you and determine if the site is safe.
2. Be alert and observant; develop a sense of consciousness regarding your immediate environment.
3. Pause at the door before knocking and listen. If you hear loud quarreling, sounds of fighting, or other disturbances, leave immediately.
4. Make a note of other exits/entrances as soon as you enter the dwelling.
5. If you feel outnumbered, leave the building.
6. If pets are in the home and are potentially threatening or distract you from your work, ask that they be put in another room for the visit.
7. Do not go into a dark room (basement or attic) first. Have the client go first and turn on the light. Follow, never lead, even if you have been in the dwelling before.
8. When sitting, choose a hard chair if possible, to increase the chance of getting up more quickly. If possible sit with your back to a solid wall, not an unknown space. Sit as close to an exit as possible.

Conduct business as needed

1. Reevaluate the need for PPE.
2. Always keep an escape route in mind.
3. Assess the situation as necessary to complete the complaint investigation.
4. Complete all documentation.
5. Dispose of any contaminated PPE. Restock PPE supplies as needed.

After making the site visit

1. Call the front desk to report that you have completed your work. Let them know what time to expect you back in the office or where your next stop will be.
2. Complete necessary paperwork and notifications per Department procedures.
3. Notify your manager of your findings.
4. An employee may need to go home to change, shower after the visit if clothing, shoes or other personal wear has been soiled during the site visit. Employees should notify their Manager if this is necessary and document the situation on the complaint report.

Personal Protective Equipment Available for Complaints

1. Gloves
 - Latex or vinyl -thin available for blood borne pathogen exposure
 - Nitrile- available for most chemical exposures
 - Leather-work gloves to protect hands from physical injuries
2. Goggles- Available for chemical splash hazards
3. Safety glasses- Available to protect eyes from flying objects
4. Steel toe boots- To protect from falling or rolling objects. They should be puncture resistant.
5. Filtering Face piece Respirator- also known as a dust mask- It does **not** protect against chemical exposure, but it does provides protection from particulates.
6. Protective clothing
 - Tyvek lab coats, aprons, suits, shoe covers protect personal clothing from contamination.
 - Coated Tyvek suits-provides some chemical protection.

Required Personal Protective Equipment for Investigations

1. Routine Public Health Nuisance Complaints: At a minimum, staff should have available gloves, tyvek lab coat, safety glasses and shoe covers to protect their own personal clothing from contamination. The items do not need to be worn if contamination is not a concern. If any hazard is noted, appropriate PPE should be used.
2. Public Health Nuisance Complaints with possible chemical involvement: Staff should wear coated tyvek, tyvek shoe covers, nitrile gloves, and safety goggles. If a meth lab is discovered, employees should immediately leave and notify the Washington County Sheriff's Office, Narcotics Unit (call 911) and local law enforcement. Staff should not reenter this situation until the Drug Task Force has cleared the premises.

Training

Training will include hazard awareness training so employees are aware that PPE does not eliminate the hazard and that if the equipment fails an exposure will occur.

Training shall include:

- When PPE is necessary
- What type of PPE is necessary
- How PPE is to be worn
- Limitations of the PPE
- Proper care, maintenance, useful life and disposal of PPE

Written records, attachment B of County Policy 5403, certifying the training was received will be kept.